



Newtonville Area Council - Meeting Agenda
Tuesday, November 16, 2021 7:00 PM
Meeting Location: Online via Zoom

Attendees:

- NAC Members: Peter Bruce (President), Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay (Secretary), Susan Reisler, Martina Jackson, Jessica Aker Archer, Pamela Shufro
- City Government: Emily Norton and Tarik Lucas
- Approximately 20 members of the public

President Peter Bruce called the meeting to order and confirmed the presence of a quorum. The request from some Walker Street residents to be added to the agenda was unanimously approved.

- 1. NAC Election Results:** It was announced that the 3 candidates on the printed ballot (Martina, Carolyn and Jennifer Bentley) were elected. Three individuals (Nancy Greenberg, Timothy Leblanc and Aline Sammut) received more than 25 write in votes and others received fewer than 25 write in votes. Martina and Carolyn were tasked to find out about how to interpret these results and report at the December meeting.
- 2. Bylaws:** Peter reported that the City Solicitor had approved the wording of a proposed amendment of the NAC Bylaws to change the quorum requirements, but action on the proposal was deferred to the December meeting to give the required 2 weeks' public notice.
- 3. Walker Street:** Walker Street resident Sharon Russo, joined by project abutters Susan Rako and Erin Geraghty Kapoor and nearby resident Timothy LeBlanc, spoke about neighbors' concerns with the proposed 28-unit condo project at the Oakley Spa block. Concerns expressed included project scope, parking adequacy, and inadequate consultation with neighbors, as well as a feeling that City Council is not listening to the neighbors and may approve the Special Permit application with its requested waivers very soon. Peter Harrington offered to try to facilitate contact with the developer.
- 4. Updates**
 - a) Cleaning up the village center - problems and strategies:** Susan Reisler reported on her efforts to get the City to do a better job of maintaining the cleanliness and condition of the Bram Way, Walnut Street business areas and the outdoor seating at the Senior Center, including enlisting Councilor Leary in the effort and making renewed overtures to Newton North High School's civic engagement coordinator, Claudia Wu, who agreed to help create signs for business storefronts. Peter Harrington suggested contacting the Mayor's office to request a budget allocation for more rat-resistant trash receptacles.
 - b) Report on City's response to Public Records Act request for documents on proposed 709 Washington Street gun shop:** Carolyn reported that, after prodding, the City released 800+ pages of materials in response to the NAC's request, but that much of the material was repetitive and that the response contained no emails or documents dated between the end of January 2021 (i.e., the gun shop application) and a resident's April 14, 2021 email (i.e., when

residents started to find out about the proposed gun shop). Carolyn suggested following up on the response as being deficient and the sense of the meeting was that she should do that.

- c) **Success of the four Area Councils' candidate debates:** Peter Bruce reported on the successful event and complemented Chris Pitts' efforts as producer.
- d) **Latest designs for Senior Center/NewCAL:** Marc Kauffman, the community member of the Design Review Committee, provided an overview of the latest iteration of the architectural proposal for the NewCAL project at the senior center site. He reported on concerns about the proposed use of brick, metal panels and cement fiberboard surfaces, limited setback from the street questions about blending into the neighborhood. Discussion comments echoed these concerns and highlighted added concerns such as the size and scope of the project for the limited space, the need for outdoor and green space, and consistency with the architectural heritage of Newtonville Center, including the iconic Masonic, the Bank of America and the current senior center buildings. Marc said he would draft a memo for the Design Review Committee summarizing the comments. An added comment was made about the MBTA's plans for a modernistic commuter rail station also being out of character with Newtonville Center.

5. Zoning Redesign community engagement project: Review and discussion of results and of Q&A responses at Planning Department's November 15 meeting

- a) **Metrics and methodologies**
- b) **What do the results mean for Newtonville's Village Center?**
- c) **What do we and our constituents want?**
- d) **Do current plans for old CVS site next to Masonic Hall fit?**

Discussion included expressions of concerns about whether the POLIS interactive tool and other outreach methods were scientific and reliable for extrapolating about community preferences and how wide participation had actually been. In particular the discussion highlighted an apparent dissonance between City Planning Department's assertions that 1,700 people participated in the POLIS survey (corrected the earlier statement that 2,000 participated) the fact that the POLIS question receiving the most responses garnering only 536 responses. Comments also questioned the failure to conduct a randomized quantitative survey rather than only using qualitative methods that were vulnerable to self-selection bias and possible notetaking bias. Discussion also highlighted concerns with City leaders' apparent support for up zoning and developers' desires for increased urbanization versus residents' support for more open and green spaces. Further concerns included the impact development projects and gentrification have had, and continue to have, on low- and middle-income affordability and urbanization's impacts on the environment and community. Comments also noted the difficulty of financing the amenities and initiatives residents want with a tax base that is heavily reliant on residential property taxes.

➤ **ACTION ITEM:** Per the sense of the meeting, Pam agreed to create a presentation for vetting at the December NAC meeting on issues with the City's outreach effort.

The discussion included considerations of the need to be proactive with regard to potential projects, including the upcoming projects at the former CVS site on Walnut Street, as well as in providing neighbors' concerns with the Walker Street project not before the City Council.

6. Administrative issues

- a) **Review and approval of October meeting minutes:** Action was deferred.
- b) **Authorizing reimbursement of other Area Councils for the NAC's share of debate expenses and to recognize the service of Marc Kaufman**

Carolyn moved, Jessica seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED: To approve the expenditure of \$175.00 as the NAC's share of the costs of the Area Councils' candidates' forums, namely \$150.00 to each of the 3 moderators and \$25.00 for expansion of the WAC's Zoom capacity, as to which the Newtonville, Upper Falls and Highlands ACs will each contribute \$25.00 and the WAC (which has a limited treasury balance) will contribute \$25.00. Part of the NAC's commitment will be paid by contributing 3 of the \$50 gift cards that the NAC from MIDA generously contributed for Village Day.

Noting that the NAC received an additional gift certificate donated by MIDA to the Village Day and that he has graciously provided assistance for many years, Peter moved, Carolyn seconded and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To present a \$50 gift certificate to MIDA to Marc Kaufman in recognition of his assistance with the artwork for several Village Day events.

d) Helping City Health Dept. publicize survey for ARPA funding from federal government: Carolyn moved, Martina seconded and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To use the NAC emailing list to share the Newton Department of Health solicitation of ideas for the use of ARPA funds.

5. Adjournment

At approximately 9:45 PM, Jessica moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay

Secretary